

Analysis of Translation Errors Among Jordanian Students When Translating the Text *Al-Ġazāla Al-Dakillah**: The Case of 4th-Year Spanish-English Students at Al al-Bayt University

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Abstract—Translation is a much more complicated task than it really seems. It is a work in which nuances, knowledge, culture, and the transmission of science are important. The aim is to study the translation errors made by the students of the Translation - 2 course at the University of Al al-Bayt in order to improve their level and learn about and solve the difficulties that our students have. We have asked them to translate a text taken from the book *Uncle Hamdī's Tales*, which is considered a simple literary text full of sentences with different tenses and highly varied vocabulary. We have detected that there are many spelling difficulties, problems with the semantic meanings in the translation, and failures in terms of correctly translating the syntactic structure of Arabic sentences into Spanish. We have proposed several ways to solve these problems, including spending more time in the course to review tenses with students, strengthening their vocabulary, and having optional tasks to raise their level of writing and spelling.

Index Terms—translation, syntax, morphology, spelling, semantics

I. INTRODUCTION

Al al-Bayt University is one of two Jordanian universities which teach the Spanish language as a specialty (Bachelor's in Languages: Spanish and English). It has around 400 students in this major, and includes over 18 courses in Spanish, of which two are translation courses.

It is important to always try to improve students' Spanish level in order to offer better graduates to the labor market, as well as people who can use Spanish proficiently in various sectors of Jordan (tourism, translation, press, etc.).

The idea for the study arose after observing how many students had problems with Arabic-Spanish translation. The errors' causes must be understood in order to resolve them and raise the students' level.

Our research intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. Analyze the translation errors committed by students in the Translation – 2 (advanced) course at Al al-Bayt University in Jordan.
2. Seek out the causes of each mistake in order to find a proposal for resolving these errors.
3. Change the course content according to what students need in order to graduate with better levels of Arabic-Spanish translation.
4. Give recommendations to Spanish language teachers in Jordan in both universities where Spanish is taught, so that their students do not make the same translation mistakes.
5. Contribute more research to our libraries to improve Arabic-Spanish translation in Jordan, which could strengthen ties between Jordan and Spanish-speaking countries, as well as have better graduates for the Jordanian labor market.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is important to closely analyze the level of Arab students learning Spanish, apart from analyzing their mistakes and knowing the reason behind each one, in order to improve translation methods between the two languages and how the translation process is taught.

We have observed that many students in the Translation – 2 course at Al al-Bayt University make various types of mistakes when translating Arabic texts into Spanish. We will study these mistakes and try to classify them, which will help highlight student errors and let professors concentrate on correcting the student.

We have recorded a large number of studies related to analyzing translation errors between various languages. Each of these adopts a different methodology to classify errors. The studies by Elgamal (2017) and Tawfiq (2000) analyze

* We used the Arabic transcription system from the Al-Qantara journal in this study.

grammatical-level mistakes in religious texts. By contrast, Rodríguez (2001) centered more on analyzing errors from the perspective of sentences' syntactical structure in Spanish and Arabic.

Other studies also analyzed errors from different perspectives. For instance, Molina (2001) studied the analysis of culture translation, with their difficulties and the most common errors made by translators. Other studies also consider more than one aspect at once, particularly the study by Lu and Luo (2000) about translation mistakes between Chinese and Spanish regarding the meanings of words, sentence structure, and cultural knowledge.

According to Espinoza (2018) and Marotta (2018), the most common translation errors arise from choosing the right word (semantic value), spelling mistakes, and syntactic expression. Other studies including Orozco-Jutorán (2006), Cruces (2001), and López (2018) state that the most common mistakes are semantic value, lack of cultural knowledge, and grammatical and syntactic mistakes.

In the present study, we will analyze translation mistakes made by Translation 2 students in terms of the three following aspects:

1. Errors in the semantic sense.
2. Spelling mistakes.
3. Syntactic structure errors.

We have chosen a text (*Al-Ġazāla Al-Dakillah*) extracted from the book *Tales of Uncle Ĥamdī* (Al-Masry, 2010) because it is considered a simple literary text corresponding to the level of students in the Translation-2 course. It also has diverse vocabulary related to nature, animals, and social life, and has various types of subordinate and compound sentences to examine students' syntactical level.

III. METHODOLOGY

Our study sample consists of students in the Translation – 2 course (35 students) within the undergraduate Spanish and English major. These students previously studied the materials of Intensive Spanish 1 and 2, Writing (Introductory and Advanced), Conversation 1 and 2, along with courses in Advanced Spanish Grammar and Translation 1. At this level, students should be able to translate texts between Spanish and Arabic, and vice versa. However, they always present mistakes when translating, which motivates us to study these errors, their causes, and how to avoid them. This allows us to improve teaching in this course, and translation students' overall level.

We have divided translation errors into three groups; the first considers spelling-related mistakes, the second covers semantic errors, and the third includes relative failures in the syntactical order of the Spanish sentence and poor verb conjugations.

We will analyze each error in each group and find out the reason for it, in order to finally offer a model to help avoid such errors. This will let us consider these errors in the future when teaching translation to students. This model will consist of the conclusions which we draw from each error, and we will leave errors from specific texts up to future studies (specifically legal texts) since they form much of the corpus for translations done in Jordan in various translation service offices and companies.

A. Analyzing Students' Most Common Spelling Errors

We have detected and recorded all the mistakes made by students. This has let us observe that the most frequently mistranslated word is الغزالة *al-gazāla* (la gacela, the gazelle). Many students translate it as *gazela* (13 students). This implies that there is a problem in distinguishing the letters *c* and *z* when expressing the phoneme /θ/. We have also detected the following translations of the same word *gazilla*, *gazlla*, *gazel* and *gazala*, which are related to the same mistake when distinguishing the letters *c* and *z*. It should be mentioned that the final translation (*gazala*) uses the same pronunciation and letter order as the Arabic word *gazāla*. This error is because the etymological origin of the word *gacela* comes from the Arabic noun *ġazāl*, and in the feminine form the suffix *a* is added: *ġazāla*.

In turn, three students translated this word as *gacila*. In this case, the students have not yet perfected the distinction between the phonemes /e/ and /i/. This is a common problem for Spanish language learners, and has been reflected in the translation of the Arabic word *al-ġazāla*.

Spelling mistakes have also occurred when confusing the letters *v* and *b*. Thus, one student translated the noun *al-gazāla* as *el cierbo*, using the letter *b* instead of *v* when trying to call the animal in question a deer. However, this mistake has not been repeated many times throughout the text in the various words using both letters. It should be mentioned that the student also simultaneously made a mistake about the semantic sense, since in Arabic the word for deer is *zabī*.

We saw that 21 students made a mistake when translating the expression *al-ḥayawānāt al-'alīfa*. The most appropriate translation for this expression would be the plural feminine noun *mascotas* (pets). However, 3 students translated this phrase correctly from a semantic perspective, but forgot the pluralizing suffix *s*. One student translated the expression as *mescota*, misusing the vowel *a*, and using the vowel *e* in its place.

Similarly, two students made two spelling mistakes when translating the expression *al-ḥayawānāt al-'alīfa*: *muscotes*. We can see that they have used the vowel *u* rather than *a*, and they have not chosen the proper suffix to express the female gender, as they have used *e* instead of *a*.

Other spelling mistakes when translating the same expression included *masqatas* and *masqotas*. In both translations, the students used the letter *q*, although it is considered grammatically incorrect in this case. This implies that some students confused the letter *q* with *c*, and do not properly understand the correct usage for them.

We have also noticed various spelling mistakes when translating the plural noun *usūd* (leones, lions). Seven students translated it while maintaining the stress mark from the singular *león*. This shows that these students have trouble with understanding accentuation and stress patterns in Spanish, and cannot clearly distinguish stress pattern variations. Three students also translated *usūd* as *l ónes*. This also implies difficulties with the concept of proparoxytone stress.

This latter mistake, apart from the spelling *liones* perpetrated by another student, shows the influence of the English word *lions* on students' minds when translating the Arabic plural noun *usūd*.

After this, we found that over ten students could not properly translate the feminine Arabic noun *qaria* (*pueblo*, village). It should be observed that the mistakes are not repeated between students; rather, each one makes a different mistake.

In one case, a student translated the noun as *puelvo*, erring in the graphic expression of the letters *v* and *b*. The same occurred with other students who present it as *vuelvo* (also confusing *p* with *v*) or *bueblo* (confusing *p* with *b*). The spelling mistakes in *boeblo* and *bueblu* also show mistakes when differentiating *u* and *o*. There are also mistakes including more than one of the aforementioned errors. These cases include *vublo* and *vuello*, where students also used *l* instead of *b*.

When translating the word *huḡūm* (*atacar*, attack), two students translated it by adding another *t*: *atacar*, presenting a clear English influence. Another student translated it as *ataqu é*, which appears very similar to the French word *attaque* with a similar meaning. Yet another student used the letter *i* instead of *a* for the same translation: *aticar*.

When reviewing translations of the verb *tabḥaṭ* (*busca, está buscando*, look, is looking for), we have observed a wide range of spelling mistakes. Some students misused verb tenses, such as *estaba buscar* (She was to look), *he buscando* (I have looking), *se queda buscar* (remain to look), etc. However, one student used the letter *o* instead of *u*: *boscando*. Yet another student made two mistakes; using a *p* instead of a *b*, and also inserting an *a* after the *s*: *pusacar*.

Finally, when translating the verb *ta'kulahā* (*las comen*, they eat them), various students made spelling mistakes when expressing this verb in Spanish. We have observed the forms *comiaron* and *comeres* among other mistakes in this regard.

B. Analyzing Semantic Understanding-Related Translation Errors

As in the previous part, we have found a plethora of mistakes related to the meaning of each word. In this case, it is not a syntactic or spelling mistake, but a misunderstanding of the Arabic word, thus leading to an incorrect translation.

To begin, we have found semantic errors when translating the word *huḡūm* (*atacar* or *ataque*, attack). Two students used the noun *lucha* (struggle) and the verb *lucharon* (they struggled). This is considered a semantic error, since *lucha* refers to an aggressive act or conflict between two or more parties. However, *atacar* or *ataque* is an aggressive action that one party carries out against another. Similarly, another student used the noun *conflicto* (conflict) in the same context, which is also considered wrong, since *conflicto* means almost the same as *lucha*, rather than *ataque* or *atacar*.

Another error of meaning which arose in the translations is the case of the Arabic noun *حصان ḥiṣān* (*caballo*, horse). Three students in the Translation – 2 class translated this word using the expression *cabello*, which refers to the hair which grows upon the head, not the mammal animal. We have also found the translations *capillero* and *cabagero*. In this context, we can observe that students attempted to refer to the noun *caballero* (knight), but with spelling errors. This noun refers to a person who rides a horse, not what the original text requires (a mammal called *caballo*).

We subsequently noted two errors in meaning which could be due to the student forgetting or not knowing the proper word in Spanish. One student translated the verb *ta'kulahā* (*para comerles*, to eat them) through the verb *matar* (to kill). Another student translated the noun *usūd* (*leones*, lions) with the word *perros* (dogs). These mistakes can occur when the student tries to shoehorn in a term or lexical unit which appears close to the meaning of the translated word.

Another mistake related to words' semantic value lies in translating the noun *ḡāba* (*bosque*, forest). One student translated it as *jardín* (garden), which has a different meaning: 'a place where flowers or ornamental plants are cultivated'. Another student translated the same word as *fuerste*, presenting a clear English influence.

There were also various incorrect translations of the past tense verb *هجرة ḥājarat* (*han inmigrado/ inmigraron*, immigrated/have immigrated). Two students used the verb *ir* (to go) in this context, which is considered erroneous. Others used the verb *trasladar* (to move) which also could not be used in this context. One student used the verb *escapar* (to escape), which may have a similar meaning, but is not the most appropriate translation of *ḥājarat*. Similarly, one student used the verb *viajar* (to travel) with the spelling mistake *veaje*; we also consider this an inappropriate textual translation.

Finally, one student made a mistake by translating the verb *tabḥaṭ* as *sercando*. It appears that the student used a form derived from the English *search*, without realizing that this form does not exist in Spanish.

C. Syntactical Order Mistakes in Spanish Translation

We have observed two syntactic errors arising from translating the verb *tahḡum* (*atacar*, to attack) followed by the preposition *'alā* (*contra/sobre*, against/upon). One student translated them with only the preposition *contra*, thinking

that this preposition could express the meaning of the verb *atacar* at the same time. Another student made almost the same mistake, but using the preposition *por* (for) instead of *contra*.

Another very common mistake among students is related to prepositional phrase in the sentence: *bada át al-'usūd tahǧum* (los leones empezaron a atacar, the lions began to attack). One student translated this sentence as *empezaron un ataque a* (they started an attack to). In this case, the student mistakenly used the preposition *a* (to) to introduce an indirect object ([*a los animales*, to the animals] instead of [*contra los animales*, against the animals]).

Another mistake in the same sentence was the use of the preposition *contra* instead of *a* to introduce a prepositional phrase: *han empicido contra* (they have started against) (we can also see a spelling mistake when writing the participle *empezado*/started). Another student made the same mistake, but used the preposition *por* (for) in the same context.

Other students left out the preposition *a* and placed the infinitive verb directly after the verb *empezar*. We could also observe the same previous mistake using the verb *comenzar* (to start) (**comenzaron comer a los animales*, they started eat the animals).

In the same sentence, various students did not properly conjugate the verb *empezar* in the proper past tense, presenting the following mistakes: *empiezó* (began), *han empicido* (have begun), *empezados a* (begun to), *empec é* (I began), *empezo* (begin), and *embezaban* (beegan).

When translating the verb *ta'kuluhā* (*comerlos*, to eat them), various students did not choose the proper infinitive verb conjugation. Some used the second person imperfect indicative *com ús* (you ate). Others used the first-person plural indefinite past tense *comimos* (we ate), and some also chose the third-person plural form *comieron* (they ate).

Some students also used other mistaken tenses in this context, including *se comieron* (they ate), *cometela* (eat it), and *comemos ellos* (we eat they). Some students also did not spell the verb tenses properly, such as the two following mistakes: *comiaron* (they eat) and *comeres* (eat).

When translating the verb *tufakkir* (*piensa/ pensando*, think/thinking), many incorrect syntactic forms arose. One student translated this verb using the indicative imperfect tense *pensaba a* (thought to). This is a syntactic error, and inappropriate in this context. Some students did not translate this Arabic verb, and merely used the preposition *por* to be understood as the verb *pensar*.

One student translated the previous verb with the expression *al piensa en* (when think about). Others used the preposition *por* followed by the construction *piensa en* (think about). The two previous cases show that these students have problems applying Spanish infinitives.

One student used the expression *pensar amigo* (to think friend) without putting the preposition *en* between the two lexical units.

However, we have seen three spelling mistakes for the same verb, namely: *panso en* (I think of), *pensiendo en* (theenking of), and *pensiendo sobre* (thienking about). The third form also shows a mistake in choosing the right preposition in the sentence.

Finally, we have found a large number of mistakes when translating the sentence *ǧalāsāt al-ǧazāla hazīna* (la gacela se sentó triste, the gazelle felt sad). One student used the verb *sentirse* (to feel) but incorrectly conjugated and spelled: *se sientto cansado* (he feel tired). In this case, the student has problems with the indefinite tense and the stress mark, as well as not properly applying the female gender and not finding the right semantic sense for the Arabic adjective *hazīna* (*triste*, sad).

Another notable error was *tristemente pensaba* (sadly thought). In this case, there is a semantic error with the verb *pensaba* (thought). The student also could not properly express the adjective *triste*, and instead used the adverbial form *tristemente*.

Another frequent student error is using *ser* or *estar* (to be) before the verb: **es senter huerte* (is feel fed up). In this context, it is true that the student wanted to use the adjective *harto* (fed up), which is inadequate for translating this sentence¹. The student also misspelled *sentirse* (to feel).

We also noticed a case of not using the verb *sentirse* in its pronominal form: *sentaba triste*. There were also various incorrect forms of conjugating the same verb: *sentió triste*, *senterse treste* (to feel sad), *senterse cansado* (to feel tired), and *se senterse triste* (was feel sad). There were several students who misspelled the adjective *triste* as *treste*.

One student used the verb *ser* in the indefinite tense after the adjective *triste*: *fue triste* (was sad). In this context, the student used the verb *ser* (denoting long-term conditions of being) rather than *estar* (for more transitory states).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on analytical data, we conclude that spelling mistakes are the most common among Translation – 2 students, followed by syntactic order errors, and finally mistakes related to translating Spanish words' semantic sense.

This indicates a need to follow up with students to improve their writing level and reduce the number of mistakes they make in this regard. It would also be appropriate to provide optional writing homework to Translation – 2 students to overcome these spelling problems.

We have also detected a sizable number of syntactical mistakes made by students, indicating that these students should review all verb tenses and know how to use them in each context. To face this matter, we recommend that

¹ We also saw various semantically incorrect ways of translating *triste* (sad), such as: *cansada* (tired), *en mal situaci ón* (in a bad situation), etc.

professors, when translating texts with students, concentrate on verb tense translation. It would also be good to dedicate the first two or three classes in the semester to reviewing Spanish verb tenses and invariable words (prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions, and interjections).

We have also found a large number of mistakes related to semantic meanings, albeit fewer than with spelling and syntactic mistakes. These errors are often due to misunderstanding the original text, confusion with another English or Arabic word, or lack of studying by the student (for mistakes with simple words). To face this challenge, we propose that students write additional texts about general topics, which the professors must then correct to show students the right choice for the meanings of words in the original text, and so students can expand their vocabulary and choose the best word for translation.

Finally, our most crucial objective is to change the course as a result of our findings, so that our students can improve their Arabic-Spanish translation level and receive more effective teaching at Al al-Bayt University.

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